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FIVE MEMBERS OF ID THEFT CONSPIRACY SENTENCED TO PRISON FOR SCHEME THAT ABUSED LEGAL NAME CHANGE SYSTEM

Ring Leader Sentenced to than Five years in Prison

Five members of a large identity theft and bank fraud ring were sentenced today in U.S. District Court in Seattle in a case dubbed "The Name Change Game." The leader of the ring, TRINA CALDWELL, 31, of Kent, Washington was sentenced to 60 months in prison and five years of supervised release for Bank Fraud and Aggravated Identity Theft. TRINA CALDWELL was sentenced to 36 months for bank fraud with the mandatory 24 months consecutive sentence for Aggravated Identity Theft.

According to records filed in the case, TRINA CALDWELL was one of the leaders of a large ring who abused the legal name change system to commit bank fraud. Conspirators repeatedly obtained name change orders from King County District Court under false pretenses and used those orders to get valid drivers licenses. Using the drivers licenses and false social security numbers, the conspirators would open bank accounts, write bad check or write bad checks to each other's accounts and withdraw cash before the checks would bounce. More than 50 stores and banks were victimized in this way. Losses to the banks was approximately \$86,000 and losses to various businesses were in excess of \$140,000. Once the conspirators had committed all the fraud they could under one name, they would go to court and request a new name change sometimes indicating they were getting married or wanted to take their father's name. These representations were false. But once the name change had been accomplished, the fraud cycle began once more. TRINA CALDWELL coached other members of the ring on how to execute the fraud.

Four other members of the ring were sentenced today: TRINA CALDWELL's mother, CLARETHA CALDWELL, 45, of Tacoma was sentenced to twelve months and a day.; MELANIE COCKER, 35, of Seattle, was sentenced to 14 months; BIRDIE BELLINGER, 46, of Los Angeles was sentenced to 24 months and BETTY JEAN KENNEDY, 52, of Seattle was sentenced to 15 months. At sentencing, prosecutors filed exhibits showing the multiple drivers licenses obtained by each defendant in various names. All five defendants entered guilty pleas over the fall of 2007.

The case was investigated by the Social Security Administration Office of Inspector General (SSA-OIG), the FBI, and the King County Sheriff's office.. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Vince Lombardi as part of the U.S. Attorney's Office working group on Identity Theft.